

# Hiring and Supporting People With Disabilities



Produced by the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce Diversity Committee  
and Hire Potential Indiana with a generous grant from ADA-Indiana

2003

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# Introduction

*I am very pleased to have been asked to write the introduction to this handbook. It will help you provide your employees an improved opportunity to reach their potentials. That's good for them; they can be more successful. And, it's good for you; if employees are more successful, then you will be also. The bottom line? The bottom line!*

*I know in a handbook like this we must, but I have a strong aversion to using the word "disability." Consider its definition:*

*Dis•a•bil•i•ty (dîs'e-bîl-î-tê) noun*

- 1. The condition of being disabled; incapacity.*
- 2. A disadvantage or deficiency, especially a physical or mental impairment that prevents or restricts normal achievement.*
- 3. Something that hinders or incapacitates.*

*I don't like the word for two reasons. First, its definitions are all negative. When we are faced with the decision of whether to hire a person with a disability, or we are making plans to accommodate the needs of such a person, we may see ourselves as facing a problem, not an opportunity. We naturally want to avoid problems, right? But what if they are solutions in disguise? If we don't accept this, we might not hire or help someone who can do great things for our business.*

*Then there's the self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon: if we think something is a problem, there's a good chance it will be! It may turn out badly just because we think it will.*

*Second, I don't like the "d" word because it is too simplistic to describe human attributes. Through the process of law at the federal, state and local level, we have categorized what makes a person "disabled." But those categories cover only a small portion of the variations of human capability, and mostly only the ones we can see.*

*The categories miss very important attributes such as how people think, how they collect and catalog information, how they learn, how they respond to stimulus, how they react emotionally and how they interact with others. In most work places, these attributes are often much more important than whether a person is in a wheelchair, can hear or see well or can climb stairs.*

*This handbook will help you deal with persons who meet the usual definition of being "disabled." It will explain your responsibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other such legislation. And, it will tell you how easy and inexpensive it usually is to provide reasonable accommodation.*

*Beyond that, I hope that the handbook will stimulate you to look at your workforce in a different way and ask yourself what you can do to help all of your employees do the best that they can for themselves, and for you. What modifications can you offer so that every employee can do better, not just those protected by the ADA?*

*Steve Howard, President  
The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce*

## Who is Protected by the ADA?

The ADA applies to *a person who has* a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (such as sitting, standing, or sleeping . . . there is no definitive list of covered impairments).

- The ADA covers more than just people who are deaf, people who are blind, or people who use wheelchairs.
- People who have physical conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, HIV infection or severe forms of arthritis, hypertension, or carpal tunnel syndrome may be individuals with disabilities.
- People with mental impairments such as major depression, bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder, traumatic brain injuries or mental retardation also may be covered.

The ADA also protects *a person with a record* of a substantially limiting impairment.

Example: A person with a history of cancer that is now in remission may be covered by the ADA.

And the ADA protects *a person who is regarded* (or treated by an employer) as if she has a substantially limiting impairment.

- Sometimes, a person may be covered even if she has no impairment or has a minor impairment, particularly if the employer acts based on myths, fears, or stereotypes about a person's medical condition.

Example: An employer may not deny a job to someone who has a condition some people might regard as a disability, such as burns, limps or lisps. People with these conditions may not have a disability as defined by law, but they are protected from discrimination because people wrongly perceive them as "disabled."

In employment, the ADA protects only *a person who is qualified* for the job she has or wants.

- The individual with a disability must meet job-related requirements (for example, education, training, or skills requirements).
- The individual with a disability must be able to perform the job's *essential functions* (i.e., its fundamental duties) with or without a reasonable accommodation. This definition confuses some people. It simply means the person is able to do the job to your standards, with or without some help from the employer.



## Frequently Asked Questions

Here are several concerns business leaders have expressed as reasons they were reluctant to hire people with disabilities.

### **Why should I recruit and hire people with disabilities?**

The answer is, it makes good business sense. In order for your business to grow, you want workers who are qualified, dependable and an asset to the company. Often, people with disabilities can meet your business needs. Be sure to consider this important, and growing, potential recruiting pool when filling vacancies.

### **Isn't it going to be very expensive for me to make my business accessible to applicants and customers with disabilities?**

This concern is shared by many businesses, but experience shows it is unfounded. Studies have shown that more than half of all accommodations cost less than \$500 and more than 80% cost less than \$1,000. Approximately 20% cost nothing at all. In addition, there are resources available to help with some accommodations. (See the Resource Appendix.) Help in the form of tax credits may offset the costs of removing architectural barriers, and are also available for other accessibility improvements, such as providing an interpreter.

If a person needs an accommodation and it is an undue hardship (too expensive) for your business, you're not legally required to provide it. However, keep in mind that the easier it is for people with disabilities, as well as aging citizens, to access your business, the more profit your company will enjoy. People with disabilities represent a market with needs like other customers, as well as a potential job applicant pool.

### **Will my insurance rates go up?**

A survey of human resource managers, conducted by Cornell University, has found that companies' health, life and disability insurance costs rarely rise because of hiring employees with disabilities. However, attitudinal stereotypes about people with disabilities remain pervasive in the workplace, causing them to be hired less and fired more frequently than workers without disabilities.

### **How will hiring people with disabilities affect the**

### **morale of my other employees?**

Your concern about your other employees is one that every good manager needs to consider in hiring *any* new employee. Depending upon your other workers' experiences with people with disabilities, they may be uncomfortable at first, but this doesn't usually last long, once they get to know the person. It's fine, of course, for co-workers to provide the same kind of typical, natural supports to an employee with a disability as they provide to others, such as offering rides, sharing breaks and giving tips on how to handle the job. You may need to make sure your other workers are not trying to assist the person with a disability too much.

### **What happens if the person with a disability doesn't work out in my company?**

The issue of a person with a disability experiencing performance problems which might lead to termination is an issue that many employers fear. It is never easy to terminate anyone from a job. However, if the employee is not able to do the work, with or without reasonable accommodations, and after efforts have been made to correct the performance without results, you are within your legal rights to terminate the employee with a disability, just as you would any other employee.

### **How do I deal with a person with a disability in an interview situation and what if I say the wrong thing?**

You may be concerned about the proper etiquette when meeting and interviewing someone with a disability. Should you offer your hand? Should you move furniture? What if you make a mistake or say something you think might be offensive, such as "Nice to see you" to a blind person?

All of these feelings are common when you first meet someone with a disability. However, the more contact you have with people with disabilities and the more interviews you conduct, the more comfortable you will become. If you make a mistake, just shake it off and move on. We are all human and make mistakes. One good source of information is "The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities," an entertaining video that you may borrow. See the Resource Appendix.

## Recruiting People with Disabilities

When recruiting applicants, reach out to the entire community, not just to sources of previous applicants. Develop and maintain contacts with people with disabilities. If you establish relationships with people with disabilities, you'll go a long way towards establishing credibility and communicating your desire to include people with disabilities in your applicant pool.

Here are a few specific suggestions:

- Make your buildings and grounds accessible.
- Send all of your vacancy announcements to disability-related

organizations and groups.

- On your job announcements, mention your interest in receiving applications from people with disabilities.
- Volunteer to serve on boards of disability groups.
- Participate in job fairs or exhibits at conferences and meetings sponsored by local disability-related groups.
- Make job announcements available in alternate formats, such as large print, Braille or audio tape.



## Providing Reasonable Accommodations

Many people in the business community believe accommodations for people with disabilities are costly. In reality, many accommodations cost little or nothing. The first step is to stop thinking that accommodations take only the form of a ramp or other structural changes. This is often not the case.

Learn to look at a situation and ask, "Can we do this any other way?" Just because "that is how we've always done it" does not mean it is the only way it can be done. Remembering this can make the difference in gaining or keeping a valuable employee.

Most accommodations are simpler than you might expect. A few examples:

- When talking to an applicant or employee with a hearing impairment, be sure to face him. Don't cover your mouth with your hand.
- Some medications have side effects such as dry mouth and fatigue that may mean an employee will need an accommodation. Some examples:
  - For dry mouth, allow the employee to carry a container of water with them on the job, or wear a "camel," a pressurized container.
  - For both dry mouth and fatigue, allow the employee to take shorter, more frequent breaks to rest, to get a drink of water or to take medication.
- In a situation where an employee is having difficulty performing functions that are not essential to his/her position, consider switching marginal functions with a co-worker.
- If an employee is hard of hearing and can't answer the phone, accommodating is often easy.
  - Have incoming calls directed to Relay Indiana. (See Glossary.) This service is free, but is an option only if the employee uses a TTY/TDD. (Note: People who have had throat operations and can't speak may also use a TTY/TDD.)
  - Assign another employee to answer the phone for this person.
  - For an employee with some hearing, buy a phone that has an adjustable volume for the receiver. This feature is

standard on most office phones and the phone can be used by anyone.

- Lastly, there are different devices that can be bought to increase the volume past what is adjustable on most phones. They are simply added to the phone. While the most costly, this last option still costs less than \$100.

- For employees who have trouble with reading or memory, consider color-coding supplies. This could help the employee recognize which substance goes into which container. This accommodation, while not free, is very low cost.
- Index cards could be used to help an employee with a memory impairment remember what comes next.
- For an employee with a vision impairment, consider these options:
  - Provide screen enlarger software for his computer
  - Provide agenda and other materials electronically, in advance on a disk or send via email.
- For an employee with motor control difficulties, consider these options:
  - Provide keyguards for keyboards, which prevent unintentional stroking of keys.
  - Change the controls on the keyboard to enable the employee to use the number pad as a mouse.
- Additional options for accommodations for different situations include the following:
  - Put a desk on blocks instead of getting a new, higher one for a wheelchair user.
  - Move the site of an interview with an applicant who has a mobility impairment.
  - Format job applications in large print.

These are just a few examples of the wide range of affordable options available to help businesses get and keep employees with disabilities. Frequently, all it takes is a willingness to look at things in a different way. Keep in mind that the best resource is often the person with a disability. He's likely been living with a disability for some time, and can suggest many affordable, effective accommodations.

## Practice Pointers

Trying to apply the legalese of the ADA to real-life work situations can be daunting. We hope the following practice pointers make it a bit easier.

- Employers don't have to hire someone with a disability over a more qualified person without a disability. The ADA's goal is

to give people equal opportunities, not unfair advantages.

- Funding is available to help offset the cost of providing reasonable accommodations. Small businesses with either \$1,000,000 or less in revenue or 30 or fewer full-time employees may take a tax credit of up to \$15,000 each year



for the cost of providing reasonable accommodations such as sign language interpreters, the purchase of adaptive equipment or the removal of architectural barriers. The credit is called the Small Business Tax Credit IRC Section 44: Disabled Access Credit.

- Businesses that hire people from certain targeted low-income groups, including people referred from vocational rehabilitation agencies and people receiving SSI, may be eligible for an annual tax credit of up to \$2,400 for each qualifying employee who works at least 400 hours a year.
- Don't use safety concerns as a blanket excuse for not hiring a person with a disability. Your employment decisions need to be based on specific, substantiated concerns about a particu-

lar person, not on myths, unsubstantiated fears or stereotypes about a person's ability to do the job safely.

- Let your applicants and employees know how to let you know they need an accommodation. For smaller businesses, this might mean a statement on your application and in your personnel manual, explaining who your contact person for reasonable accommodations is.
- If you find that a requested accommodation would result in an undue hardship for your business, and you can substantiate that conclusion, you don't have to provide it. But you do have to consider whether there are other, more affordable, accommodations that will work. Often, as outlined in this handbook, reasonable accommodations are quite affordable.

## Glossary of Terms

**Accommodations:** These are adjustments or modifications provided by an employer to provide people with disabilities equal employment opportunities. Accommodations must be provided to a person with a disability if doing so does not cause an undue hardship. This occurs when providing the accommodation would result in significant difficulty or expense. Accommodations vary depending on the individual and his or her needs. Examples include:

- Scheduled breaks for someone who has diabetes to monitor blood sugar and insulin levels.
- Repositioning work or work supplies for an individual who uses a wheelchair.
- Sign language interpreter for a person who is deaf.
- Removing nonessential tasks from a job or reassigning them to another worker.
- Modifying a work schedule to enable an employee to work at maximum productivity.

**Adaptations:** Some individuals may require specialized equipment to perform their job. Some examples: voice recognition software for someone who has a visual disability, an amplifier for someone with a hearing disability, amplified stethoscopes for use by a nurse with a hearing impairment.

**Disability:** There are many different types of disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act covers those individuals who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example, sitting, standing, or sleeping).

**Employment Agency:** Several agencies in our community help to support people with disabilities to get and keep jobs. There is a list of those agencies in this handbook under Resources.

**Job coaching:** A job coach is someone who assists in training or guiding the performance of an employee. Some

workplaces may refer to this as a personal trainer. Job coaching can be provided by anyone within the workplace (supervisor or co-worker) or may be provided by an employment agency.

**Job development:** Employment agencies that work with people with disabilities may represent that individual to employers in the community. The act of finding the right job that suits that person's strengths, interests, and support needs is called job development.

**Work Opportunity Tax Credit:** WOTC is an incentive provided under IRS Code Section 51 to employers who hire targeted groups, including people with disabilities. Employers who hire eligible individuals may receive an annual tax credit of up to \$2,400 for each person who works at least 400 hours during the tax year.

**Personal assistance:** Some individuals may require the support of a personal assistant for certain daily living activities (e.g., eating, using restroom facilities, etc.). Support can be provided by people within the work setting or by individuals from an outside agency.

### **Social Security Disability Insurance/ Supplemental Security Income:**

(Commonly known as SSDI and SSI, respectively.) Some individuals with disabilities are eligible for SSDI or SSI. There are many work incentive programs available to recipients of these services to enable them to work while maintaining their eligibility status for these benefits.

**TTY/TDD:** A machine that allows people with hearing or speech disabilities to communicate over the phone using a keyboard and a viewing screen.

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** VR is a state agency that provides assessment, education, training, and support to people with disabilities entering or returning to work. VR provides services and funding to individuals based on their work goals and their support needs. VR is a good source of qualified employees with disabilities.



## Resources

There are many local, state and national organizations that provide support to businesses to recruit, hire and train individuals with disabilities, or provide invaluable information. The following is a partial list of the agencies and the services they provide.

### Abilities Unlimited

(812) 332-1620  
PO Box 1814  
Bloomington, IN 47402  
Email: [abulim@bloomington.in.us](mailto:abulim@bloomington.in.us)

Provides medical equipment, individual and family support services and home modification for accessible living. Camp scholarships for children and adults with disabilities available.

### ADA-Indiana

C/O Indiana Institute on Disability & Community  
(812) 855-6508  
2853 E. 10th St.  
Bloomington, IN 47408  
[www.adaindiana.org](http://www.adaindiana.org)  
Email: [adainfo@indiana.edu](mailto:adainfo@indiana.edu)

Provides information about the ADA. Also conducts training for businesses and local communities. Funds small grants for local community ADA implementation grants (not for building or personal accommodations).

### Anthony Wayne Services

(812) 863-2426  
Route 3, Box 342 E  
Bloomfield, IN 47424  
[www.awsusa.com](http://www.awsusa.com)

Offers a variety of services for people with disabilities.

### Association for Persons in Supported Employment

Phone: (804) 278-9187  
Fax: (804) 278-9377  
[www.apse.org](http://www.apse.org)

Information about supported employment services across the nation.

**Bloomington Human Rights Commission**  
(812) 349-3429  
PO Box 100  
401 N. Morton St.  
Bloomington, IN 47404  
[www.city.bloomington.in.us](http://www.city.bloomington.in.us)

Provides answers to questions relating to the ADA; investigates complaints of discrimination.

### Center for Behavioral Health

1-800-344-8802  
TTY: 1-800-944-9411  
645 S. Rogers St.  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
[www.the-center.org](http://www.the-center.org)

Provides a wide array of behavioral health services for children, adolescents and adults. Emergency staff is available 24 hours a day. Transportation is available for many services and facilities are wheelchair accessible.

### Council for Community Accessibility

C/O CFRD  
PO Box 100  
Suite 260  
Bloomington, IN 47402  
Craig Brenner  
[www.city.bloomington.in.us](http://www.city.bloomington.in.us)

Promotes community education and public awareness, and advocates for concerns of people with disabilities. Operates a Speakers Bureau and offers free consultations. Has a copy of the video, "Ten Commandments of Communicating with People With Disabilities," that you may borrow.

### Department of Workforce Development

[www.IN.gov/dwd/information/fast.html](http://www.IN.gov/dwd/information/fast.html)

Excellent website for anyone seeking employment, education programs and information on a variety of employment issues.

### Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Washington, D.C.  
Phone: 1-800-669-4000  
TTY: 1-800-669-6820  
[www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

Enforces the employment provisions of the ADA.

### Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana/Monroe County Career Development Center

(812) 355-2500  
800 S. College Ave.  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
[www.bloomington.in.us/socserv/iris/Goodwill\\_Industries.html](http://www.bloomington.in.us/socserv/iris/Goodwill_Industries.html)  
Email: [pbaylor@bloomington.in.us](mailto:pbaylor@bloomington.in.us)

Provides job development, placement and coaching for persons with disabilities.

### Governor's Planning Council for People With Disabilities

(317) 232-7770  
TTY: (317) 233-7771  
150 W. Market St., #628  
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2821  
[www.state.in.us/gpcpd/html/staff](http://www.state.in.us/gpcpd/html/staff)

Promotes public policy leading to independence, productivity and inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society through collaboration, education, research and advocacy.

### Great Lakes ADA Center

1-800-949-4232 (voice/TTY)  
1640 W. Roosevelt Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60608  
[www.adagreatlakes.org](http://www.adagreatlakes.org)  
Email: [gldbtc@uic.edu](mailto:gldbtc@uic.edu)

This is one of the ten regional centers funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, a division of the U.S. Department of Education. It provides up-to-date technical assistance and training to businesses and people with disabilities regarding the ADA. It provides training sessions on request on topics such as employment rights and responsibilities, reasonable accommodations, government responsibilities, disability awareness and effective communication. Excellent source for current information about court cases and resources.



### Hire Potential Indiana

[www.hirepotentialindiana.org](http://www.hirepotentialindiana.org)

The goal of Hire Potential Indiana is to increase employment of people with disabilities in our area by improving the awareness among business of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and linking employers to information and resources.

### Indiana Institute on Disability and Community

Center on Community Living and Careers  
(812) 855-6508  
2853 East 10th St.  
Bloomington, IN 47408  
[www.iidc.indiana.edu](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu)

Part of Indiana University, this research and training center provides assistance with employment for people with disabilities, as well as for other disability areas. It is an excellent source for referral, training and additional information.

### Job Accommodations Network

1-800-526-7234 (V/TTY)  
[janweb.icdi.wvu.edu](http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu)

Information and direct consultation on job accommodations for people with disabilities.

### National Organization on Disability

Washington D.C.  
Phone: (202) 293-5960  
TTY: (202) 293-5968  
[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

Offers information and resources on disability issues

### The National Rehabilitation Information Center

1-800-346-2742  
[www.naric.com](http://www.naric.com)

A library and information center focusing on disability and rehabilitation research. The NARIC Web page includes five searchable databases which provide more than 60,000 resources.

### Options for Better Living, Inc.

(812) 332-9615  
214 S. College Ave.  
Bloomington, IN 47402  
[www.optionsfbl.com](http://www.optionsfbl.com)

Provides support to employers to hire, train and accommodate individuals with disabilities.

### Southern Indiana Center for Independent Living

Albert Tolbert  
(812) 277-9626  
TTY: (812) 277-9628  
3300 West 16th Street  
Bedford, IN 47421  
Email: [atolbert@kiva.net](mailto:atolbert@kiva.net)

Provides services to maximize the independence of individuals with disabilities, such as independent living skills training, information, referral and peer counseling.

### Stone Belt Center

(812) 323-4631  
2815 E. 10th Street  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
[www.stonebelt.org](http://www.stonebelt.org)

Helps persons with disabilities attain independence through developmental education, sheltered and community-based employment, residential services and other assistance in community living.

### Sycamore Services

(317) 745-4715  
PO Box 369  
Danville, IN 46122  
[www.sycamoreservices.com](http://www.sycamoreservices.com)

Provides services and training for people with disabilities.

### Vocational Rehabilitation

(812) 332-7331  
450 S. Landmark Ave.  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
State's website: [www.in.gov/fssa/servicedisabl/vr/](http://www.in.gov/fssa/servicedisabl/vr/)

Provides vocational counseling, placement assistance, and job training support for people with disabilities.

### Workforce

[www.workforce.com](http://www.workforce.com)  
Award-winning human resources site with 1,500 articles, assessments and policies, as well as lively bulletin boards and opinion columnists. Offers a section in its Research Center devoted to legal issues.

### Work One Bloomington

(812) 331-6000  
450 S. Landmark Ave.  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
[www.dwd.state.in.us](http://www.dwd.state.in.us)

Provides vocational counseling, placement assistance, and job training support for people with disabilities and employer referral service. Its Work One Customer Self Service System allows employers to list job openings. Potential applicants then can match their skills and interests to jobs listed and apply.

### The Work Site/Office of Employment Support Programs

[www.ssa.gov/work](http://www.ssa.gov/work)

Website produced by the Social Security Administration offering an array of information from employment opportunities for people with disabilities to information on SSI, SSDI, service providers and much more.

### Worksupport.com

Phone: (804) 825-1851  
TTY: (804) 828-2494  
Fax: (804) 828-2193  
[www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com)

Website offering information resources and research to connect employers with people with disabilities.



The Chamber wishes to thank the Diversity Team members who contributed to this handbook:

**Charlotte Zietlow**  
**Barbara E. McKinney**  
**Marsha Bradford**

**Lillian Casillas**  
**Natalia Rayzor**  
**Frank Epperson**  
**Susan Rinne**

**Dorothy Granger**  
**Steve Howard**  
**Mike Horvath**

Our thanks to ADA-Indiana that graciously underwrote the printing cost of this handbook.

And finally, our thanks to the many people who reviewed early drafts of this handbook and who made so many helpful suggestions.

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